



# Advocacy and the Magdalene Laundries: towards a psychology of social change

Jennifer O'Mahoney

Q1

Waterford Institute of Technology, Department of Applied Arts, College Street, Ireland

## ABSTRACT

This article will describe how a project documenting interviews with survivors of Ireland's Magdalene Laundries explores the relationship between psychology and advocacy. The Waterford Memories Project focuses on documenting survivor narratives both for subsequent qualitative analysis and a publicly accessible record of the women's experiences about events, which remain silenced and hidden in Irish society. The process of documenting the women's narratives is, in itself, an action toward social change because it challenges the lacuna of information and data available from the Irish Government and Religious Orders. The archives of the Laundries are heavily restricted, and the women's voices suppressed, which has implications for the ability of survivors to integrate their experiences of violence into personal narratives. In this project, an action-approached focus to psychological research with the survivors of the Magdalene Laundries provides strong evidence for the suitability of applying psychological methods to social and moral issues.

## KEYWORDS

advocacy; Engagement;  
Magdalene Laundries;  
narratives; social change

5

10

15

20

## Ireland's Magdalene Laundries


The initial motivation behind the founding of Magdalene Asylums<sup>1</sup> in the 19th century was societal and political concern regarding the interrelated issues of prostitution and venereal disease. Institutions, which rescued women who had “fallen” into prostitution and associated “rescue work,” became an important area of public philanthropy in 19th century Britain and Ireland. Hence, Magdalene Asylums were a common feature in societies outside Ireland in the 19th and early 20th century, by 1900 there were more than 300 in England and at least 20 in Scotland (Finnegan 2004). Many North American cities were also home to such asylums, including New York, Boston, Chicago, and New Orleans. Between 1765 and 1914, at least 40 refuges or asylums were formed in Ireland for the rescue of fallen women, the majority surviving into the 1980s and 1990s (Luddy 2007). The institutions bore the title of “Magdalene” in reference to Mary Magdalene, described in contemporaneous Catholic doctrine as a

25

30

35

Q2

**CONTACT** Jennifer O'Mahoney  Waterford Institute of Technology, Department of Applied Arts, College Street, Ireland.

© 2017 Taylor & Francis

reformed prostitute who was rewarded for her penitence and service to Jesus with love and compassion.

During the final two decades of the 19th century there was a decline in prostitution in Ireland, which likely resulted from improved educational and employment opportunities for women, as well as high levels of emigration (Titley 2006). Irish Independence in 1922 saw the removal of British soldiers, diminishing the market for prostitution. As a result, the Magdalene Asylums based in Ireland were forced to rethink their ethos in order to maintain their existence. These institutions turned toward unmarried mothers, victims of sexual assault, and girls who were “sexually aware” or “demonstrating marked tendencies towards sexual immorality” to maintain their clientele base (Raftery & O’Sullivan 1999, pp. 27–8; Titley).

The strong Catholic identity of the Independent Irish State in 1922 greatly influenced the State’s need and approach to reform wayward women who did not fit the model of the Irish family structure and thus were “excluded, silenced or punished” (Conrad 2004, p. 3). The institutions began to accommodate fewer voluntary entrants, and increasing numbers were detained for longer periods (many for life). Therefore, these institutions increasingly served a punitive function.

After Irish independence and the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922, 10 Magdalene Laundries operated between 1922 and 1996. Many of these institutions shared overriding characteristics, including “regimes of prayer, silence, work in a laundry and a preference for permanent inmates” (Smith 2007, p. xvi). While Magdalene Laundries existed in Europe, America, and Australia, the Irish Magdalene Laundries are notable for their comparative longevity, remaining in existence until 1996 while similar Laundries in other countries were closing in the early to mid-20th century (Smith).

Life in the laundries was characterized by silence, prayer, and hard labor as women worked long days laundering and ironing soiled sheets from hospitals, hotels, and other businesses (Department of Justice 2013; O’Donnell 2011). Girls were often transferred between industrial schools and the laundries without warning or explanation (Raftery & O’Sullivan 1999). The girls were kept in a constant state of emotional and psychological turmoil, often unaware of why they were there, how long they would remain, or whether they would be transferred elsewhere. The girls were under constant control of the Religious Order and deprived of an education, rest, and privacy, and were assigned new names and uniforms (O’Rourke 2011).

### ***Policing women’s sexuality***

The Church and the fledgling Irish Free State cooperated increasingly throughout the 1920s to guard and police the nation’s moral climate. In particular, the Catholic Church enforced a moral control over women’s

bodies through a social and legal establishment of power, which managed domestic life, education, health, the arts, welfare entitlements, and religious participation (O'Mahony & Delanty 2001). An example of some of the core legal and economic restraints are described by Cullen and Luddy (2001, p. 1): 80

The 1926 Civil Service Act legalized a sex barrier in competitions for posts; from 1927 women were effectively barred from jury service under the Juries Act; from 1932 female civil servants and teachers lost their jobs on marriage; in 1934 the Criminal Law Amendment Act placed a complete ban on the importation of all contraceptives; in 1936 the Conditions of Employment Act empowered the Minister to restrict the employment of women in industry; the 1937 Constitution clearly signified the place of women as being exclusively in the home. 85

Effectively, women found themselves marginalized and restricted and helped establish the image of Ireland as a sexually pure and moral nation, enforced by an unrelentingly puritanical attitude to sexual expression (Finnegan 2004). As a result, those guilty of "crimes" such as extramarital sex were flaunting conservative Catholic moral values. However, it seems clear this requirement was policed only in the case of women. The control of women's sexuality, in both practice and discourse, became one of the main strategies by which the Catholic Church maintained its power, with severe consequences for those considered to have transgressed (Inglis 1998; Luddy 2007). 90 95

Claudia Lenz (2010) has analyzed the ambivalent and yet crucial role women played in the constitution of national ideology and nationalist policies. She notes that, on one hand, women are constructed as biological and moral "bearers" of the nation, responsible for its ethical continuity and future existence; on the other hand, they are regarded as neither capable of coping with the challenges of public affairs nor reliable in political matters (Lenz, p. 87). In the Irish context, it has taken decades before Irish society began to articulate the Magdalene story in a public forum with compassion. These women were essentially "written out" of Irish history, deemed too morally dangerous to remain within mainstream Irish society, instead incarcerated against their will in Magdalene Laundries to repent for their so-called "sins." This incarceration formed a collective punishment of what was regarded as deviant sexuality, with the aim to reestablish the nation's sexual order (Lenz). 100 105 110

To understand the social and historical exclusion of this group of Irish women, it is important to recognize the patriarchal role of the Catholic Church and Irish State. To engage in qualitative analysis of materials related to the institutions and survivors, it is negligent to ignore the role of advocacy in the research process, particularly when issues of social justice are at the focus of the research. Generally, advocacy can be defined as "any action taken to support the needs of a particular person, group, or issue in order to affect change" (Cumiskey 2014, p. 49). Advocacy can 115

take the form of professional or social engagement. However, psychologists' engagement with professional advocacy (such as the promotion of education and the practice of psychology) appears to be more accepted and less contentious than engagement with social advocacy (Jarrett & Fairbank 1987).

Whether advocacy forms a conscious motivation for psychologists in working with survivors of trauma, our dissemination of analyses related to such participants can be used to directly or indirectly inform policy, education programs, and/or legislation, which may impact the lives of our participants. Psychologists often provide advice to policy makers, government agencies, and health organizations. They may also be involved in designing and using assessment and diagnostic tools or conducting evaluation and efficacy studies on the implementation of policies and interventions. The decision to engage in advocacy can either be at the fore of a researcher's motivation, or scholars can find themselves in the public focus as an advocate if their research becomes a focus of public interest, particularly when there is a moral implication to the work.

This interest in advocacy has historically been conceptualized as a reducing researchers' objectivity and, as a result, reducing their quality of research. Marczyk (2016, para. 8) has gone so far as to state that "advocacy can only serve as a cognitive constraint that decreases research quality as the goal of advocacy is decidedly not truth. Advocates should update their conclusions in light of the research; not vice versa." Herein lies the crux of the issue. Is engagement in research tainted by engagement with advocacy? I argue that for many qualitative psychologists engaged with social justice work, the role of the researcher involves becoming part of the solution. In qualitative work, often the methodology, theory, and action of the researcher are inextricable. This does not mean, however, advocates cannot conduct high quality research. Research is heavily influenced by the scholar's perspective; even a supposedly objective, quantified approach to psychology reflects a set of beliefs on the part of the researcher. How and why a researcher examines and interacts with the participant is an important consideration in any piece of research. The next section of this paper will consider this debate in light of my own experience with a social justice focused research project.

### **The Waterford memories project**

My first contact with a survivor of the Laundries was through my work with my local rape crisis center. I met Susan<sup>2</sup> more than 10 years ago when she was participating in a study I was conducting examining the long-term social repercussions of sexual abuse. Susan was in her mid-60s and was reaching out for counseling for the first time in her life about sexual abuse she had

experienced as a child. During my interview with Susan, she told me about how she had reported the abuse to a teacher in school (a Catholic nun), and this information was relayed to the local priest. Susan was unsure what transpired regarding her allegations, but clearly recalls being removed from the family home and sent to an industrial school, and then transferred to a Magdalene Laundry around the age of 14. Rather than the removal of the perpetrator, the decision was taken to remove a young child and place her in an institution. I was deeply affected by Susan's story and horrified at this treatment of a young child who was silenced and punished for her trauma experiences, and failed by her family, society, the Catholic Church, and the State. I knew very little of the Magdalene Laundries, which were only beginning to be discussed in the Irish media. Susan's story resonated with me for many years, as I was working in the very building, which was Waterford's former Magdalene Laundry.

The College Street Campus of the Waterford Institute of Technology, purchased in 1994, is the former site of a convent of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd of Angers (commonly known as the Good Shepherd Sisters), as well as the St. Mary's Good Shepherd Laundry and St. Dominick's Industrial School. Not only was I working in the building, but also my office was located in the convent and was the bedroom of a former nun. As a psychologist and women's advocate, I felt compelled to understand more about these institutions and understood that psychological research had a great deal to contribute to our understanding of the Magdalene Laundries.

To date, the scholarly examination of the Laundries has been heavily focused on historical and sociological explanations of the existence of these institutions. Analysis of the Laundries has been hindered by the refusal of the Religious Orders to grant access to their records and archives, which remain inaccessible to the public and researchers. The continued restriction of the archives "points to the role of the Irish state and religious orders as gatekeepers of information and key participants in gendered violence toward survivors" (O'Mahoney-Yeager & Culleton 2016, pp. 134–5).

Aside from academic analysis, the only official State comment on the Laundries arrived in 2013 in the form of the *Report of the Inter-departmental Committee to Establish the Facts of State Involvement with the Magdalene Laundries*. The report has been heavily criticized by survivor groups for its limited focus on establishing the facts surrounding the extent of the State's involvement. While the report includes testimony from survivors (chapter 19), "the Committee did not make specific findings in relation to [the living and working conditions in the Magdalene Laundries], in light of the small sample of women available" (Department of Justice 2013, p. 50). Little significance was placed on the survivors' testimony.

The Waterford Memories Project (WMP) was established with the explicit aim to challenge the silencing of the Magdalene women and to publicly document their stories, both as an awareness campaign and to encourage academic analysis of the historical, social, and psychological impact of these institutions. The WMP is an oral history project in digital humanities with the primary aim of safely archiving narratives of the Magdalene Laundries and Industrial Schools in southeast Ireland to record our cultural heritage and provide a platform for further analysis of our history. The research thus presents both a record of experience and a commentary on it; locating individual stories within larger contexts, not least that of the social history of the Southeast of Ireland in the 20th century.

Advocacy, then, forms part of the research aims of the WMP by providing a voice to those held in these institutions and locating these stories within a larger social and historical narrative informed by archival research. A secondary (and related) aim is to make this database available to scholars and members of the public to promote both academic and public engagement with this restricted, silenced, and contested part of our history, and advocates on behalf of the women by presenting their stories to the public.

The survivors are the primary focus of this project. Given the relative cultural “invisibility” of many of the survivors of these institutions at the time of their incarceration (and often for decades afterwards) it appears particularly vital to remember, commemorate and learn from their experiences at a local, national, and international level. The WMP works to further the aim of remembering a period in Irish history where society’s legal, constitutional, and moral obligations were sometimes overlooked and, in the case of this cohort of women and children, largely ignored altogether.

### ***The project’s methodology***

Qualitative inquiry encourages researchers to acknowledge biases in research and analyses and to be as transparent as possible when disseminating work. This desire for transparency informed my decision to place complete (and unedited) interviews with the Magdalene survivors online as part of the WMP.<sup>3</sup> The public access to the interviews in their entirety is both a rigorous methodological choice, which allows my analysis of the material to be considered critically by other scholars, and reflects my desire to advocate on the part of these women by aiding to disseminate their stories according to their wishes.

The methodology of the oral histories was carefully considered to ensure best ethical practice. The ongoing aim is to collate and present the oral histories of the girls and women, as well as the employees, clients, and visitors of the Laundry to address the lack of public information about the lived experience of those involved. The secondary aim is to archive these



histories for future generations in the form of a “virtual museum” website. The initial interviews were conducted with referrals from the Justice for Magdalenes survivor group and snowball sampling based on these initial contacts. As the project is becoming more established interviewees have been making direct contact. 245

The public nature of the dissemination of the interview material requires a longer period of consideration and contemplation before an interview is held. The women are offered a comprehensive consent form with options to use pseudonyms, have their voice or visual image altered, or to have their data withheld until a later date (including a detailed recording agreement, which covers copyright agreement for the recordings). Times, dates, and locations of the interviews were at the interviewees’ discretion. To date, I have conducted all of the interviews as I previously have experience working with survivors of trauma. 250 255

The interviews are semi-structured and were designed to align with content in interviews the Justice for Magdalenes group had previously collated as part of their archival work. The interviews focus on the interviewees’ background information, their life before entering the laundry, their arrival, the daily regimes at the laundry, leaving and the aftermath, redress, and their current state. 260

### Advocacy as part of the research process

The process of documenting the women’s narratives with the WMP is, in itself, an action toward social change, challenging the lacuna of information and data available from the Irish Government and Religious Orders. In this sense, advocacy occurs during the research and is viewed as more than just a desirable output or consequence of the research. The archives of the Laundries are heavily restricted and the women’s voices suppressed, which has implications for the ability of survivors to integrate their experiences of violence into personal narratives. The psychological literature is expansive in discussions of memory and trauma. 265 270

Any discussion of memory and the Magdalene history should acknowledge the associated trauma and heavy emotional weight around the events. Connerton (2008) describes this type of collective forgetting as *humiliated silence* where broad-scale silence around an event associated with humiliation is covert and unacknowledged, resulting in collusive silence (as a desire to forget the events) and a collective shame. When we consider the Magdalene institutions’ dominant presence in Irish society, in conjunction with decades of silence and a lack of comment on the subject, we are faced with “the tacit imposition of a taboo” (Connerton, p. 68). Zerubavel (2006) further argues that perceiving something as stressful and socially taboo are strong reasons for restraining what is mentioned in a conversation. 275 280

Consider, for instance, the following excerpt from an oral history interview conducted with a Magdalene survivor as part of the WMP: 285

It's very important that they remember that what they have done to us as people, they have done to our family. My children suffer. My children are the way they are because of who I am. Because of who they made me. They made me this way. I try my hardest to get through this, to make my life better. I've always said my children will never have the life I had. My children will never want for anything. I don't want my children to know misery. My children know I love them but I can't show them. And, in turn, because I can't do that for them I'm afraid it's going to affect them and their children. So, it's a ripple effect. They didn't just do this to me, they did it to my kids and so on and so on. I can't say it's going to be an easy battle, it's not. Mentally, emotionally and physically we were damaged in some way. The hard part for us, for me as well, they deprived us of an education. We worked the Laundries instead of getting an education. It's very humiliating when you're sitting there with your child and they're trying to do homework and you can't do it. You cannot do it. 290 295 300

For the survivor above, confronting her past involved providing testimony for the first time, recognizing her trauma, and engaging in dialogue through the research process. In explaining recovery from trauma, it has been noted that the process is *collective*, necessitating social interaction and support (Herman 1992; Pennebaker 1997; Pennebaker & Gonzales 2008; Pennebaker & Seagal 1999; Rose 1999). Much has been written about the silencing of trauma survivors when their experiences are "taboo" and therefore characterized by silence and stigma. Again, the silence here must be understood both from a personal, cognitive level (as a form of survival for the survivor) as well as in terms of broader societal processes, which encourage survivors of trauma to stay silent around topics that are prohibited from being discussed openly in society. 305 310

Narratives about crisis or trauma mark a direct response to the silence surrounding these women's lives. By archiving and sharing these stories online, the WMP provides a platform to extend these stories outside of Ireland and to bring awareness to the survivors' narratives. Presenting these interviews to a public audience in itself forms advocacy work as an action taken to affect change (Cumiskey 2014). 315

As scholars, our role of witness to these historical traumas is paramount. Qualitative investigation acknowledges the engaged role of the researcher. Recently, the term *ethnographies of engagement* (e.g., Clair 2012; Clair & Mattson 2013) have been utilized to reflect the difficult conditions under study, as well as the role of the researcher in becoming part of the solution. In this sense, the methodology, theory, and action are inextricable. 320 325



### **Advocacy, engagement, and participant trust**

Working with survivors of trauma is challenging across many domains. Advocacy and academic analysis cannot be separated in many social justice projects, and trust and ethics are at the crux of the research process. In particular, trust is essential in the survivors' decision to participate in research. 330

In this sense, engagement becomes a requirement on both sides—the participants expect that I am engaged and compassionate, and participants are similarly active and engaged in the research project. Fundamentally, achieving informed consent from a participant is a negotiation of trust in any project. Participants clearly want to know that their stories are being managed respectfully and that the researchers have their best interests in mind. 335

Note, that I speak here of compassionate engagement and not empathy. Similarly, my aim with the online dissemination of this information is not to encourage empathy but rather to encourage compassion. The reason for this is that empathy can be biased and can be costly. Bloom (2014, para. 10) maintains that we are “more moral once we put empathy aside... [by drawing] on a reasoned, even counter-empathetic, analysis of moral obligation and likely consequences.” When writing about marginalized groups like the Magdalene survivors, the scholar's writing almost inevitably is seen as acceptance of the group's views, if not advocacy on the group's behalf (Zulaika 1995). Qualitative inquiry reminds us that there is no neutrality in research, no absolute truth, and that morality is socially constructed, by our respondents and ourselves. Maintaining this focus can help us to engage compassionately, rather than engaging too intensively through empathy, and can lead to less superficial, thick description in our analyses. 340 345 350

At its core, empathy would seem to involve an *imagined engagement* with the world being described by the Magdalene survivors. A large volume of literature has demonstrated how directly experiencing others' pain (empathy) can lead to burnout, depression, anxiety, and so forth (Bloom 2014). Direct engagement with suffering can be highly aversive (Singer 2015). Actually, being a “good person is related to more distanced compassion, along with self-control, and a sense of justice” (Bloom, para. 32). Bloom (2014) maintains that this “cognitive empathy” should be modified and directed by rational deliberation to produce a kinder world. Singer's (2015) work on effective altruism supports this notion as he describes effective altruists as relying more on reason than emotion. Certainly it is possible that effective altruists also feel empathy, but they rationally decide on action. 355 360 365

Effective altruism is, quite simply, the ethos that “we should do the most good we can” (Singer 2015, p. 8). Singer maintains that effective altruism gives meaning and fulfillment to our own lives and suggests that many

people can use reason to broaden their moral and ethical decision making and actions. He says that “effective altruism is an advance in ethical behavior as well as in the practical application of our ability to reason” (Singer, p. 264). 370

But what does this look like in practice? Engagement in research cannot be reduced to a set of procedures. While it is possible to describe some practical techniques, this should not suggest that engaging with a research participant is reducible to a set process. Qualitative methods play a key role in recognizing these concepts in psychological research but are often accused of failing to adhere to the validity standards of positivist, quantitative work as a result. Evaluating the validity of research involves making a judgment about how well the research has been carried out, and whether the findings can be regarded as trustworthy and useful. It is important for qualitative researchers to emphasize these criteria can effectively be applied to qualitative research. 375 380

For instance, compassionate engagement with an interviewee can (somewhat counterintuitively) allow for a more objective consideration of the interview material. For instance, claims of fact or views expressed by an interviewee may be incorrect or far removed from my own evaluations of events; however, a compassionate attitude allows these views to be considered in terms of the survivor’s experience of their world. Rather than dismissing these views, they hold immense interest as symbols of the survivor’s world-view to consider. What does the framing of experiences in a certain way achieve for the person in his or her narrative? Is the person simply uncertain about this experience, or does this suggest a formed schema of a world that looks very different for her than I? Compassionate engagement here is key. Variability in responses (even for the same person) is not treated as error but rather as individual and contextual variation in their world. Sensitivity to context is essential through an in-depth engagement with the topic and person’s description of their experiences. Transparency and reflexivity are equally essential in assessing the rigor of qualitative work (Yardley 2000), which has informed the public dissemination of the interviews conducted for the WMP, as well as promoting engagement with the women’s stories to allow their voices to advocate on their behalf. 385 390 395 400

One of the Magdalene survivors describes coming back to Ireland from the United Kingdom to “get answers” and to ensure that her story was heard:

I felt very bitter...I was searching for peace of mind about the standing of why this happened to me. But I understand now it’s because of ignorance, dogma corruption, greed, church, government, male domination, all that. I feel very angry still about this Catholic Church indoctrination because it all stems from that with the government and the male domination of Irish politics and it still goes on today. They’ve still ignored us, they’re still ignoring us, they’re just using any old trick. How do we know this is not going to continue or go on again in Irish society, we don’t know...but, it’ll take more than me to speak out because I think it’s too hidden. 405 410

It is the *public* purpose of placing the interviews online that is important in the WMP. This allows the sharing of stories to promote diverse debate about how we might understand the dehumanization of these women and to provide a platform for the stories to contest the hidden history of the Laundries. This public display of stories can facilitate these women taking back some of the power and control to reclaim the narrative of the Magdalene Laundries. When I asked another survivor about how she felt about the increasing media coverage and debate about the Laundries, she responded:

Well, I love that it's highlighted, it's great that there's wonderful people like yourself, getting the story out, I think that is fantastic, I think Justice for Magdalenes has done us very proud by the women, they've done a great job, they've been very good to the women. The reports that I'm getting about them is fantastic. There's one lady who has cancer, and they go and take her to the hospital and everything, they are very, very good to the women. And I think people like them, they're the ones who have made our life better...Not the government, not the Church. The Church has never stood up and said sorry to us. It's those people out there highlighting, giving out to people out there, there is that side to it that were grateful to, that we're thankful for. The apology means nothing to us now.

In this way, narration becomes “a subversive act, especially in light of powerful external and internal forces working against it” (Sloan 2014, p. 273). In other words, the collation and dissemination of the women's stories is an act against the collective forgetting as a form of *humiliated silence* where broad-scale silence around an event associated with humiliation is covert and unacknowledged, resulting in collusive silence (as a desire to forget the events) and collective shame (Connerton 2008).

The point here is that engagement and advocacy can be positive forces, which make for better relationships between researchers and study participants, providing we strike a balance between compassionate engagement (rather than empathy) and critical reason. This, combined with transparency and reflexivity throughout the research process, can further help protect against accusations of bias.

To demonstrate the positive integration of research, advocacy, and social change, the final part of this article will provide a brief example of an advocacy-driven event, which the WMP has been involved with for the past two years. The Flowers for Magdalenes annual event is an example of advocacy work, which has been directly influenced and informed by academic scholarship.

### Flowers for Magdalenes annual event

The sixth year of the annual *Flowers for Magdalenes* event took place in March 2017 and was facilitated in Waterford by the WMP. The event is

delivered as part of the continuing activist work by Justice for Magdalenes Research (JFMR), a survivor advocacy group, which worked to achieve an apology from the Irish State to the Magdalene women and the establishment of a distinct redress scheme for all survivors of Ireland's Magdalene laundries. Yearly, JFMR calls on members of the public to visit Magdalene graves and to lay flowers to honor the women who lived and died behind convent walls. The Flowers for Magdalenes events take place around the country in all cities and towns where there were Magdalene Laundries—Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick, New Ross, and Waterford. At least 1 663 former Magdalene women are buried in cemeteries in Ireland, many in unmarked graves. Additionally, due to the common practice of assigning women a new name upon entry to the Laundry, establishing the true identities of those buried or named on burial plaques is extremely difficult (JFMR n.d.). Even in death these women have continued to be silenced, hidden, and disregarded by society, the State, and the Religious Orders.

A major premise of the Flowers for Magdalene event is directly challenging this silencing through direct engagement with sites of trauma. The events are held at the grave sites where the women are buried. The focus of the Waterford event was to recognize that these women existed, how they suffered, and ultimately were silenced, and to break that silence through song, poetry, a reading of the survivors' own words, and by laying flowers to commemorate these women.

The event continues to grow in significance, with the need for active memorialization becoming even more salient as we see further potential destruction of the Magdalene history. New property developments are currently planned on three former Magdalene Laundry sites at Donnybrook, Sean McDermott Street, and Sunday's Well. In addition, during the first weeks of 2016, the former Magdalene Laundry in New Ross was demolished.

Our understanding of the Magdalene history and heritage is still heavily contested. Active memorialization, while difficult, is even more important in this context. While these events will not finalize the issue, they can be significant to survivors. Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy famously stated, "It has been said, 'time heals all wounds.' I do not agree. The wounds remain. In time, the mind, protecting its sanity, covers them with scar tissue and the pain lessens. But it is never gone." For the Magdalene women, these wounds are contested and therefore all the more difficult to heal when our society ignored and silenced these women for decades. Presence of people at events such as Flowers for Magdalenes is a direct and active response to that silence, as we show determination to remember and interact with these contested memories.

Such active methods of memorialization are required so we can learn from what happened in these institutions as an "active legacy." Both the JFMR and

the WMP hold these similar aims. Discussion of our past, present, and future, which will allow us to actively remember and actively engage in such ceremonial acts, will encourage a collective consciousness about what happens when society, the State, and Church disregard our children, sisters, and mothers.

500

## Concluding remarks

This article has considered how a project documenting interviews with survivors of Ireland's Magdalene Laundries explores the relationship between psychology and advocacy. Trauma experiences are social, like all historical events (Herman 1992; Pennebaker 1997; Pennebaker & Gonzales 2008; Pennebaker & Seagal 1999; Rose 1999). We cannot ignore the import of social interaction and collective nature of coping with trauma memory, as survivors require a sympathetic and understanding listener when coping with trauma and to begin to make sense of their experiences. As psychology scholars, we are part of this collective process when we ask survivors to participate in research projects and to tell us their stories.

505

510

As such, we are bearing witness to historical trauma. My colleagues and I become part of the collective discourse of the Magdalene story, alongside the survivors, politicians, and media. Whether these actors intended to advocate for the Magdalene women, advocacy can and will form the heart of what Magdalene scholars will accomplish their work. In this project, an action-approached focus to psychological research with the survivors of the Magdalene Laundries provides strong evidence for the suitability of psychologists to examine and advocate on these social and moral issues.

515

Ernest Boyer (1996, p. 20) argued that "campuses should be viewed by both students and professors not as isolated islands, but as staging grounds for action," as we need a larger sense of purpose and mission in order to allow the scholarship of engagement to occur through communication between "academic and civil cultures." Boyer's call to move from our distanced ivory towers into the contexts of the groups we study is at the cornerstone of the scholarship of engagement but, I would argue, also requires advocacy. As researchers employed by higher education institutions, we are considered public servants; scholarship is measured by its service to the wider community and nation (Boyer).

520

525

The core ethos of the WMP is to document survivor narratives to challenge the continued silencing of the Magdalene women in a direct action toward social change, as it challenges the lacuna of information and data available from the Irish Government and Religious Orders. The project's future intention is to collate this digital material into educational packages for schools and universities, and members of the public interested in Irish memory and history. There are currently two additional plans for future

530

535

dissemination, creating a virtual tour of the former laundry and industrial school in Waterford and developing an educational pack for schools. The virtual tour is in its early stages on the website, and the project will be engaging with students of architecture and film to establish a permanent record of the physical buildings on site. Plans for the educational pack include seminars with leading experts in education and Irish history to create datasets (available from the website) for secondary and third level educators to use in classrooms. It is envisaged that these datasets will include video clips, readings, tasks, and images to enhance active learning and interaction with local and national history about the Laundries, which is currently not considered in second-level coursework in Ireland.

Such advocacy is essential in order to contribute to a public understanding of experiences of the Magdalene women, as well as the cultural, political and economic significance of these stories to our Irish heritage. The WMP's action-approached focus to psychological research with the survivors of the Magdalene Laundries provides strong evidence for the suitability of applying psychological methods to social and moral issues.

## Notes

1. The early institutions were variously titled Asylums, Refuges, and Penitentiaries and later became known as Magdalene Laundries.
2. A pseudonym has been used here to protect the survivor's identity.
3. The only editing of content in the interviews was to censor any names mentioned by the interviewee in order to protect others' privacy.

## Notes on contributor

**Jennifer O'Mahoney** is a lecturer in social, abnormal, and forensic psychology at the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). Her research focuses on how victimology and trauma are remembered and narrated by survivors and collectively by wider society. She is the primary investigator of the Waterford Memories Project ([www.waterfordmemories.com](http://www.waterfordmemories.com)), which aims to contribute toward a better understanding of the system of Magdalene Institutions that existed in Ireland through the gathering and study of testimonies from people who are directly or indirectly related to these institutions, to recognize the history and journey of the people whose lives were impacted by these institutions.

## References

- Bloom, P 2014, 'Against empathy', *Boston Review*, viewed 14 October 2016, <<http://bostonreview.net/forum/against-empathy/peter-singer-response-against-empathy-peter-singer>>.
- Boyer, E 1996, 'The scholarship of engagement', *Journal of Public Service and Outreach*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 11–21.



- Clair, R 2012, 'Engaged ethnography and the story(ies) of the anti-sweatshop movement', *Cultural Studies/Critical Methodologies*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 132–45. 575
- Clair, R & Mattson, M 2013, 'From accident to activity: an ethnographic study of community engagement—from symbolic violence to heroic discourse', *Tamara*, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 27–40.
- Connerton, P 2008, 'Seven types of forgetting', *Memory Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 59–71.
- Conrad, K 2004, 'Locked in the family cell: Gender, sexuality, and political agency in Irish national discourse', University of Wisconsin Press, Madison. 580
- Cullen, M & Luddy, M 2001, *Female activists: Irish women and change 1900-1960*, Woodfield Press, Dublin.
- Cumiskey, K 2014, 'Advocacy', in T Teo (ed.), *Encyclopedia of critical psychology*, Springer, New York, pp. 49–54. 585
- Department of Justice 2013, *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee to Establish the Facts of State Involvement with the Magdalene Laundries*, Department of Justice and Equality, Dublin.
- Eagly, A 2016, 'When passionate advocates meet research on diversity, does the honest broker stand a chance?', *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 72, pp. 199–222. 590
- Finnegan, F 2004, *Do penance or perish: Magdalen asylums in Ireland*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Gaer, F 22 May 2013, 'Letter from the rapporteur for the follow-up on concluding observations of the United Nations Committee Against Torture to H.E. Mr. Gerard Corr, ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary, United Nations Office at Geneva', Geneva, Switzerland, viewed 10 July 2014, <<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cat/docs/followup/IrelandFurtherInfo22May2013.pdf>>. 595
- Henwood, K 2014, 'Qualitative research', in T Teo (ed.), *Encyclopedia of critical psychology*, Springer, New York, pp. 1612–4.
- Herman, J 1992, *Trauma and recovery: the aftermath of violence*, Basic Books, New York. 600
- Inglis, T 1998, *Moral monopoly: the rise and fall of the Catholic Church in modern Ireland*, UCD Press, Dublin.
- Jarrett, R & Fairbank J 1987, 'Psychologists' views: APA advocacy of and resource expenditure on social and professional issues', *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, vol. 18, no. 6, pp. 643–6. 605
- JFMR n.d., 'Justice for Magdalenes (information booklet)' Justice for Magdalenes, Cavan, Ireland, viewed 10 February 2013, <[http://www.magdalenelaundries.com/jfm\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.magdalenelaundries.com/jfm_booklet.pdf)>.
- Lenz, C 2010, 'The silenced memories of the sexualised other in post-war Norway', in C Doving & N Schwaller (eds.), *Minority narratives and national memory*, Unipub, Oslo, pp. 83–94. 610
- Luddy, M 2007, *Prostitution and Irish society*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Marczyk, J, 2016, 'Psychology research and advocacy: some relationships weren't meant to be', *Psychology Today*, viewed 1 March 2017, <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/pop-psych/201605/psychology-research-and-advocacy>>. 615
- O'Donnell, K 2011, 'Justice for Magdalenes', *Irish Human Rights Commission and Law Society of Ireland Ninth Annual Human Rights Conference*, Dublin, Ireland.
- O'Mahoney-Yeager, J & Culleton, J 2016, 'Gendered violence and cultural forgetting: the case of the Irish Magdalenes', *Radical History Review*, vol. 126, pp. 134–146.
- O'Mahony, P & Delanty, G 2001, *Rethinking Irish history: nationalism, identity and ideology*, Palgrave Macmillan, London. 620
- O'Rourke, M 2011, 'Ireland's Magdalene Laundries and the State's duty to protect', *Hibernian Law Journal*, vol. 200, no. 10, pp. 200–37.

- Osterweil, M 2013, 'Rethinking cultural anthropology through epistemic politics and theoretical practice', *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 28, no. 4, pp. 598–620. 625
- Pennebaker, J 1997, 'Writing about emotional experiences as a therapeutic process', *Psychological Science*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 162–6.
- Pennebaker, J & Gonzales, A 2008, 'Making history: social and psychological processes underlying collective memory', in J Wertsch & P Boyer (eds.), *Collective memory*, Cambridge University Press, New York, pp. 110–29. 630
- Pennebaker, J & Seagal, J 1999, 'Forming a story: the health benefits of narrative', *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, vol. 55, pp. 1243–54.
- Raftery, M & O'Sullivan, E 1999, *Suffer the little children: the inside story of Ireland's industrial schools*, Continuum, London.
- Rose, S 1999, 'Naming and claiming: the integration of traumatic experience and the reconstruction of self in survivors' stories of sexual abuse', in K Rogers, S Leydesdorff & G Dawson (eds.), *Trauma and life stories: international perspectives*, Routledge, London, pp. 160–79. 635
- Singer, P 2015, *The most good you can do: how effective altruism is changing ideas about living ethically*, Yale University Press, London. 640
- Sloan, S 2014, 'The fabric of crisis: approaching the heart of oral history', in M Cave & S Sloan (eds.), *Listening on the edge: oral history in the aftermath of crisis*, Oxford University Press, London, pp. 160–79.
- Smith, J 2007, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN. 645
- Q4 Titley, B 2006, 'Heil Mary: Magdalen asylums and moral regulation in Ireland', *History of Education Review*, vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 1–15.
- Urla, J & Helepololei, J 2014, 'The ethnography of resistance then and now: on thickness and activist engagement in the twenty-first century', *History and Anthropology*, vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 431–51. 650
- Yardley, L 2000, 'Dilemmas in qualitative health research', *Psychology and Health*, vol. 15, pp. 215–28.
- Zerubavel, E 2006, *The elephant in the room: silence and denial in everyday life*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Q5 Zulaika, J 1995, 'The anthropologist as terrorist', in C Nordstrom & A Robben (eds.), *Fieldwork under fire: contemporary studies of violence and survival*, University of California Press, Berkeley, pp. 205–22. 655